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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses barriers encountered by leaders when they attempt to implement change and redirect the collective focus in groups. It describes co-creative relationships that occur when leaders and followers work together in a reciprocally responsible relationship based on a common purpose. The process of covenanting toward a common purpose, translating that intention into reality, and achieving success through the creation of synergistic relationships is foundational to changing individuals and systems. The factors essential to the development of such outcomes are described in a model for organizational and community efficacy. The model is comprised of structural, facilitative, and harmonizing elements. Structural elements include participants, structure, process, experiences, and culture. Facilitative elements are common purpose, communication, change, trust, and ritual. Balance provides the harmonizing elements. A process through which the common good might be identified within a diverse population is summarized. The ultimate responsibility for optimal implementation of the model rests on individual participants. (LMI)

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THE LEADERSHIP COVENANT: ESSENTIAL FACTORS FOR DEVELOPING COCREATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN A LEARNING COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This paper discusses barriers encountered by leaders when attempting to implement change and redirect the collective focus in groups, organizations, and communitites. It describes cocreative relationships which occur when leaders and followers work together in a reciprocally responsible relationship based upon a common purpose. In addition, learning community is defined as one in which all members are actively involved in developing skills and gathering knowledge that will contributeto a common purpose as well as to personal fulfillment. Both are related to a broader societal common good. The process of covenanting toward a common purpose, translating that intention into reality, and achieving success through the creation of synergistic relationships are suggested as foundational to the creation of transformational effects upon individuals as well as systems. Essential factors for developing such outcomes are identified and described and presented as a model for organizational and community efficacy. Building on this model, a process is summarized whereby the common good might be identified within a diverse population.

THE LEADERSHIP COVENANT: ESSENTIAL FACTORS FOR DEVELOPING COCREATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Introduction

Through the process of creating a common purpose and focusing collective energy toward desired outcomes, leaders often encounter fear and resistance to change. Often such resistance comes on the heels of influence having been exercised in a coercive manner rather than persuasively, allowing followers to freely agree or disagree with an emerging purpose (Rost, 1991). If this is true, the relationship has most likely not been developed through multidirectional interactions, but instead in a traditional unidirectional manner.

Collaboration in leadership, which includes stakeholders from all levels of an organization or community, is now widely recognized as critical to achieving results. Making decisions by consensus within groups is becoming more commonplace (Oakley and Krug, 1991). Barriers to full collaboration, however, often stem from unrecognized sources that emerge from within or without the system, including role confusion, communication gaps, power differentials, or inability to move beyond self interest. Further complications arise from various perspectives on what

constitutes the common good within a given community.

Cocreative relationships occur when leaders and followers work together in a reciprocally responsible relationship based upon a common purpose. A learning community is one in which all members are actively involved in developing skills and gathering knowledge that will contribute to that same common purpose as well as to personal fulfillment. Both are further defined herein and related to a broader societal common good.

The process of covenanting toward a common purpose, translating that intention into reality, and achieving success through the creation of synergistic relationships combine into the power to create and develop transformational effects upon individuals as well as systems (Guzmán, 1993). Essential factors for necessary for the development of such outcomes apply similarly to the evolution of a small work team, a large organization, or a community. A model is presented in this paper that describes the interaction and effects of these factors.

Cocreative Relationships

A relationship can be defined simply by using its common synonyms: alliance, association, and connection. These equivalent terms, however, do not describe the reciprocity inherent in an influence relationship (Rost,

1991) nor the synergy experienced within that context (Guzmán, 1993). Within the relationship among leaders and followers who are actively involved and interdependent participants, can be found an uncommon level of relationship through which individuals can enjoy a fuller experience of development (Guzmán, 1988) and the emergence of common purposes (Guzmán and Earll, 1992).

As suggested by Rost (1991) in his provocative challenge to traditional paradigms of leadership, four essential elements must be present if leadership exists in a situation: 1) the relationship is based on multidirectional, noncoercive influence; 2) more than one leader and followers are actively involved in unequal influence patterns; 3) they intend several real (substantive and transforming) changes; and 4) together they develop mutual purposes which become common purposes. These elements will not be fully realized without the presence of yet another set of essential elements -- those which constitute the very essence of the relationship described by Rost and which are further described by Guzmán and Earll as a *cocreative relationship,* that is, one in which participants can create new meanings, connections, influences, changes, and purposes through an evolving, dynamic flow of human energy.

Learning Community

Peter Senge (1990) described a learning organization as an organization that continually expands its capacity to create its future. A critical element of such an organization is individuals who come together with an ability, both conceptually and skillfully, to continually develop and grow as individuals who are part of a whole. Through teamwork, dialogue, and shared leadership collective vision and effort emerge.

A *learning community* engenders even more capacity than does a learning organization: it adds the critical components of a full integration of diverse beings, the evolution of shared values, and the ongoing development of intimacy. It is through the development of the learning community -- through the constant development of individual human beings within that community -- that a full and complete understanding of a common good emerges. That understanding, developed through ongoing dialogue, continual redefinition, and facilitative action, becomes the foundation for the work of the community and can provide a substantial framework for its evolution In one sense, the learning community might be described as a *healthy* structure, demonstrating a resiliency, a hardiness, and an absence of any symptoms of disorder --

with an accompanying ability to heal itself through constant awareness and refinement.

Essential Elements for Development of the Learning Community

A learning community can and will develop fully when several essential elements are present within the interactions, connections, and negotiations of its members. These elements can be described in the context of three distinct, yet connected, categories: *structural elements*, *facilitative elements*, and *harmonizing element*.

The five elements that can be considered to be the essential *structural elements* of a learning community are: *participants*, *structure*, *process*, *experiences*, and *culture*. These elements were first identified together as key components in a study of the leadership development of individuals within the context of a collaborative planning group (Guzmán, 1988). In that study they emerged as factors essential to the development of individuals as leaders -- leaders in a group that could be identified as a learning community if the criteria stated herein were to be applied as a measure.

Five elements can be identified as fundamental *facilitative elements* in this model: *common purpose*, *communication*, *change*, *trust*,

and *ritual*. These components are both results of and prerequisites to the structural elements and to each other. They were identified through an ongoing study of group and leadership development (Guzmán, 1993) through the lens of the evolving theories on team effectiveness, quality organizations, and the leadership/followership reciprocal.

A final, single element is identified as a *harmonizing element* in the totality of the interaction and evolution of the other components: that element is *balance*. As implied by its category descriptor, the harmonizing effect is a dynamic one -- the other elements are not maintained in strict or rigid form or alignment, but rather are constantly interacting. Balance connotes a continual readjustment and refinement as the human factors interrelate and continue to affect each other and the development and evolution of the whole.

Participants

To state that participants within a learning community are vital to its existence is to reiterate the obvious: without human beings coming together in an attempt to address issues inherent in life, there can be no body -- no community. The more diverse the participants are in skill, awareness, experience, values, and expectations, the more challenging

will be the development of the learning community and the inherent cocreative relationships. As participants evolve as individuals and as active parts of the whole -- as their experience provides new understandings -- their skills, levels of awareness, values, and expectations shift and blend. This is not to imply that individuals lose themselves within the whole, but that there is a relaxing of self-interest and a growing interest and commitment to the good of the whole.

Common Purpose

The commitment to a common good -- the development of a *common purpose* -- is an interactive, dynamic, evolutionary experience that provides the foundation for the maturation of the community and the individuals within that collective. Within the context of this development an important dialogue occurs. That dialogue is necessary to the development of the cocreative relationship and to the maturation of the learning community.

The act and process of communicating and negotiating common purpose takes place at both the conscious and unconscious levels of individuals and the group. It takes the cyclical form of action (coercive and persuasive), dialogue (verbal and nonverbal), and reflection (individual

and collective). It is through this process that a learning community begins to emerge and its collective personality begins to take form.

It is also through this process that individuals within the learning community become aware of structures and limitations that inhibit or enhance the outcomes. This process also becomes a matter of history for the community that eventually makes its way into the "lore" and rituals of later time periods, depending upon the further development of the community.

Structure

A *structure* is a perceived limit which is temporal, physical, or mental. It can occur naturally or be contrived. A structure is any parameter which might limit the unfolding of an organization, the development of individuals, or the results of collective efforts. Structure could be timelines, calendars, or seqences of events. Structures can also be financial in nature: budgets, funding availability, spending parameters. They can also be energy limitations, physical surroundings, resources, or numbers of participants. Mental structures include rules, policies, regulations, group norms, or paradigms (personally or group accepted mental models based upon beliefs and biases). Whether they are naturally

occurring or are created, structures can facilitate or inhibit the events which evolve as well as the development of community as a whole.

Communication

Without *communication* there can be no development of community; without communication there is no medium for individuals to interact within a larger context or to redefine and change the structures within which they operate. Full communication does not occur until intended messages are received and understood. This implies that the originator of the message must be clear on the intention and be able to articulate it accurately and that the receiver (or receivers) of that message are able to "decode" the symbols (verbal, non-verbal, and written) and decipher the meaning. Given that the process of the receiver is filtered through personal perceptions, skill level, and past experience (as well as values), accurate and complete communication is difficult to achieve, at best.

It is the responsibility of the leadership of a group, organization, or community to ensure the best possible communication through provision of skill development, the design of a clear common language, ongoing modeling of clear, honest, uncluttered communication, and continual group reclarification of beliefs, values, and statements of intent.

Process

Process is defined here as the unfolding of human events within and without the structures. The process cannot be controlled. It is the most unpredictable of the elements, just because it is contingent upon and responsible to the most unpredictable of all features: human behavior, development, interaction, and perception. In its *humanness* lies its strength -- and its *uncertainty*.

No matter how carefully structured any group might be, no matter how well a leader or follower believes controls have been imposed, no matter what history or statistics might suggest -- the unfolding of human events takes on a life of its own. And therein lies much of the beauty and wonder of the learning community.

Change

Change is a constant in the course of human and other natural events. This assumption underscores the most difficult of these essential elements to integrate and accept. Process begets change and change is certain -- even though this certainty begets much in the way of human uncertainty and fear. It is within this reality that communities become rigid and fail to achieve their promise. It is the constant of change that

individuals and groups alike battle, believing that a state, however effective or beneficial, may be more desirable than the unknown.

The fight against change (presumably to maintain a *status quo*) freezes human resources in time, locks individuals and groups in conflict (and often accompanying drama), and prevents the natural flow of the process from continuing. It is incumbent upon the leadership of any community, organization, or group to confront the fear, provide skills and opportunities for that confrontation to occur, and to guide them toward resolution and a return to the equilibrium of disequilibrium.

Experiences

One manner in which individuals become part of a stronger unit is through common *experiences*. When those shared experiences are structured toward gaining skills or knowledge necessary for determining, articulating, developing, or amplifying the common purpose, the effect is multiplied. It of further benefit for those experiences to be the focus of dialogue for the purposes of uncovering and understanding meanings.

Beyond the benefit of developmental experiences, naturally occurring human experiences such as deaths, births, losses, or life changes can be translated into shared experiences through dialogue and

conscious examination. Making such dialogue an expected collective process can bridge perceived differences over time and create a stronger fabric of the community reality. An important product of this shared knowledge and stronger reality is the building of trust.

Trust

Trust is relative -- it is contingent upon all that has gone before in the life of the one who makes a decision about that which is to be considered as possibly trust worthy. Whether an individual chooses to trust a leader, a colleague, another member of the community, a process, a structure, an experience, or a message is largely dependent upon the full collective of experience which has gone before.

Absolute trust may only be a ideological concept rather than a human phenomenon. Due to the vast array of prior life experiences represented by the members of a group, organization, or community, the trust factor will vary depending upon the level of risk involved -- and the level of risk can only be appraised by the individual being called upon to trust.

For the purposes of agreeing to a covenant and for addressing the task at hand, complete certainty is not necessary. Each individual must decide, however, given various possible situations and variables, how

much trust will be necessary to proceed. For some participants very little tangible evidence of the trustworthiness of the moment is necessary -- for others it may take nearly a guarantee of safety or a right of recision before they will continue in a relationship or endeavor. Much of this process depends upon the early life experiences of participants and may require a structured dialogue or several opportunities to break down barriers, build relationships, and remove barriers to trust (Earll, 1989). As relationships are built and trust increases, the culture of the group, organization, or community becomes healthier, more open, and more resilient to the shocks of difficulties. As the culture strengthens in this manner, a learning community emerges.

Culture

Culture is a reflection of the collective values and beliefs of individuals who come together in community. It is contingent upon the successful combination of the other essential elements and manifested in observable behaviors.

If a community purports to value all human beings, for example, the community would ideally be inclusive. Exclusivity is contrary to community (Peck, 1987). It is through the struggle and decision-making

process focused upon issues of inclusion that communities clarify and actualize this value.

Another example of a value that a community might declare is honesty. If that value is truly held, then honest communication would be expected and rewarded. Speaking the truth, even to superiors, would not be a high risk behavior in such a community. However, the true test of this value (or any espoused value) comes in its actualization and implementation in daily life.

For the culture of a community to be healthy and fully reflective of the ideals of the participants, behaviors, policies, and practices must all be congruent with stated values and beliefs. It is the responsibility of each member of the community to examine these reflections of the culture and to challenge any departure from expectations. In this manner, integrity can become the norm.

Ritual

A commonly held value or belief can be symbolized through a ritual. Such a ritual can become an important part of the celebration of the learning community and of the successful outcomes of the cocreative relationship. For the ritual to be truly reflective of the culture, it must

be acknowledged and practiced by members of the community.

A ritual can be as simple as a round of handshakes or embraces after each gathering of a group or as elaborate as a formal award ceremony. A ritual can be a collective covenant statement shared at the beginning of each day or a moment of silence in the middle of a meeting for reflection and centering. Whether complex or simple, a ritual gives special recognition and meaning to the expressed and actualized values and beliefs of a learning community. Human beings celebrate what they value; therefore, in place rituals must be examined for congruence with stated values. Where rituals are lacking, they can be created and implemented through a conscious collective process of evaluation, dialogue, and decision making.

Balance

Balance is not a state -- nor is it an event. *Balance* is an ongoing process that takes place within, between, and among individuals; it proceeds within and among all the factors described and defined herein. Balance is dynamic and fluid. It is just that flow that allows apparent disequilibrium to become equilibrium. It is that constant shift that allows system integrity to be maintained, even through a constantly

changing course of human events. It is that responsiveness and resonance that allow conflict to be the foundation for consonance. It is because of its continuous connection to the other elements, adjusting for the ebb and flow of each and all that it has been identified here as a *harmonizing element.*

Balance is the constant in this model of developing cocreative relationships within a learning community. Balance is the substance of the whole and allows disparate human beings to come together in discovery of a collective consciousness and common purpose. Balance creates the space for the common good.

A Covenant for the Common Good: Translating Intention into Reality

A *covenant* is a promise, a contract between and among parties that is considered to be binding. It is precisely that bond that builds community. A covenant goes beyond the law; it moves beyond those bounds into a realm both moral and spiritual. The covenanting process takes place at various levels: cognitive, behavioral, spiritual, and emotional and is actualized at the same developmental rate of the individuals and the whole community involved. As the individuals and the community mature, so does the depth of commitment to a higher purpose (Peck, 1993).

Covenant as Process

Within the process of determining the parameters and character of *common good* within a community of human beings; that is, through the unfolding of human events which lead to an articulation and commitment to a common purpose, the community becomes not only stronger and wiser and deeper, but also more blended. Individuals begin to give up their own personal postures and develop a sense of wholeness grounded in the collective (Peck, 1987). Separate energies join together into one stream as the collective intention becomes clearer and is translated into action. That action allows the intention to become actualized.

Intention Becomes Reality

This model, as presented, is intended to be both descriptive and prescriptive. When implemented in its fullest form, it can be utilized as a template for an ideal structure and a norm for an ideal process. All requisite components are included for the development of cocreative relationships within a learning community. What is missing is the ingredient of actual human beings. What is not present until it is implemented is the very real, often painful, sometimes ecstatic, always unpredictable human connection and drama.

The ultimate responsibility in the optimal implementation of this model rests on the individual -- whether leader or follower or both. In this new way of coming together as human beings, the individual is called upon to cast aside self interest while taking responsibility for fully developing the self. Through this new paradigm the roles of leader and follower blend into a synergistic relationship that combine exponentially the skills, abilities, ideas, attitudes, and creativity of all participants. Throughout the unfolding of the reality of this new way of being as individuals and as collectives, previously unrecognized possibilities might emerge through the application of an energy force heretofore not experienced.

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